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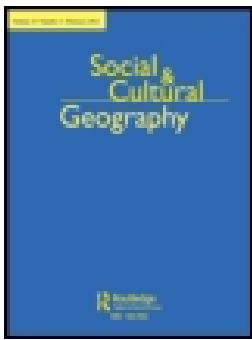
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# Drinking in the dark: shedding light on young people's alcohol consumption experiences

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## ABSTRACT

This paper draws on 12 months of ethnographic research to explore the drinking experiences of young people, aged 15–24, living in the suburban case study locations of Chorlton and Wythenshawe, Manchester, UK. This paper moves beyond the contemporary geographical imaginary of alcohol consumption as a city centre issue, to explore suburban indoor and outdoor drinking cultures. Through paying attention to atmospheres of darkness and lightness, I show how drinksapes are active constituents of young people's drinking occasions, rather than passive backdrops. More than this, I illustrate how young people transform dark and light drinksapes, thereby shaping the drinking practices of themselves and others. Through looking at the interplay between the curating of an atmosphere, and the experience of that atmosphere when bodies, and practices are inserted into it, this paper offers a different take on the 'drinking at home is bad, drinking in public spaces is good' argument, with original policy suggestions.

## Boire dans l'obscurité: éclairage sur les expériences de consommation d'alcool chez les jeunes

### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article s'appuie sur 12 mois de recherche ethnographique pour explorer les expériences de jeunes gens, âgés de 15 à 24 ans, résidant dans les lieux de cas d'études de banlieues de Chorlton et Wythenshawe à Manchester au Royaume-Uni. Cet article va au-delà de l'imaginaire de la géographie contemporaine de la consommation d'alcool en tant que problème du centre-ville pour explorer les cultures de la boisson en banlieue à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur. En s'intéressant aux atmosphères d'obscurité et de lumière, je montre comment les paysages de la boisson sont des principes actifs des occasions de boire chez les jeunes plutôt que des toiles de fond passives. De plus, j'illustre comment les jeunes transforment les paysages de boisson de l'obscurité et de la lumière, influençant ainsi leurs pratiques de libation ainsi que celles des autres. En explorant le jeu entre la gestion d'une atmosphère et l'expérience de cette atmosphère quand les corps et les pratiques y sont insérés, cet article propose une interprétation différente de l'argument que « boire à la maison est une mauvaise chose, et boire dans un lieu public est une bonne chose », avec des suggestions de règles originales.

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## El beber en la oscuridad: entendiendo las experiencias de consumo de alcohol en los jóvenes

### RESUMEN

Este documento se basa en 12 meses de investigación etnográfica para explorar las experiencias de consumo de alcohol en jóvenes de 15 a 24 años que viven en Chorlton y Wythenshawe, lugares de estudio de caso suburbanos en Manchester, en el Reino Unido. Este trabajo va más allá del imaginario contemporáneo y geográfico del consumo de alcohol como una cuestión del centro de la ciudad, para explorar los hábitos de bebida suburbanos interiores y exteriores. Prestando atención a ambientes de oscuridad y claridad, se muestra cómo los paisajes donde se bebe son componentes activos en momentos en los cuales los jóvenes beben, en lugar de permanecer pasivamente en el fondo. Más que esto, se ilustra cómo los jóvenes transforman los oscuros y claros paisajes donde se bebe, configurando así las prácticas de consumo de sí mismos y de otros. A través de la observación de la interrelación entre la selección de un ambiente, y la experiencia de ese ambiente cuando los cuerpos y las prácticas se insertan en él, este trabajo ofrece una visión diferente del concepto de 'beber en casa es malo, beber en espacios públicos es bueno', con sugerencias políticas originales.

## Introduction

The contemporary geographical imaginary of alcohol consumption tends to be one of a city centre issue (Holloway, Jayne, & Valentine, 2008), typified by a large body of work on the night-time economy (e.g. Chatterton & Hollands, 2002; Hollands, 2002; Roberts, 2006). Such work has offered important insights. For instance, Schwanen, Van Aalst, Brands, and Timan (2012) discuss the inability of some to participate as consumers in the night-time economy. The authors argue that, within the night-time economy, young people dominate, and there are also inequalities rooted in class, race/ethnicity and gender. In such work, the drinkscape of bars, pubs and clubs have been privileged over more marginal and peripheral drinking spaces. Consequently, the specificities of suburban indoor and outdoor drinking cultures are poorly understood (see, however, Townshend, 2013; Wilkinson, 2015). The work of Trell, Hoven, and Huigen (2014) in the context of Rural Estonia, provides a useful exception here. The authors explore the importance of familial homes, a local hamburger kiosk, and the outdoors as drinking spaces for young men. Trell et al. (2014) state that drinking at home may be both safer and more comfortable than partying in commercial drinking spaces, as it avoids young people travelling on relatively dangerous countryside roads. Yet the authors continue, stating that young people consider home to be a suitable space for experimenting with alcohol, or testing one's limits, and this often results in drinking to the excess. Consequently, home is the place associated with incidents of losing all inhibitions, drinking oneself unconscious, and instances when professional medical help was required after a party. In line with this, there is a tendency in popular and policy realms to consider that 'drinking at home is bad' (due to it being hidden from public view, risks of domestic violence, and the negative health consequences) and 'drinking in pubs is good' (due to it being better surveilled and policed, and also more convivial; Beckingham et al., 2010; Telegraph, 2014). Through researching into young people's, aged 15–24, drinking practices and experiences in bars, pubs, homes, streets and parks, in, between, and beyond the suburban locations of

Chorlton and Wythenshawe, Manchester, UK, I provide some more nuance to these debates, with fresh and original policy suggestions.

When drinking spaces are considered in the alcohol studies literature, they have tended to be treated as passive backdrops (Jayne, Valentine, & Holloway, 2008a, 2008b), rather than active agents with the capacity to shape alcohol consumption practices and experiences. In this paper, I engage with atmospheres to enable an exploration of the role of drinking spaces as active constituents with the ability to shape drinking occasions (Jayne, Gibson, Waitt, & Valentine, 2012). Atmospheres foreground the role of more-than-human elements to young people's alcohol consumption practices and experiences. As Bohme (2013, no pagination) puts it, atmosphere is a 'floating in-between', something between 'things' and the perceiving subjects. According to Reckwitz (2012, p. 254), 'atmosphere' denotes the 'affective' mood that spatial arrangements evoke in the sensual bodies of their users. Anderson (2009, p. 77) has also referred to atmospheres as 'affective', arguing: 'to attend to affective atmospheres is to learn to be affected by the ambiguities of affect/emotion, by that which is determinate and indeterminate, present and absent, singular and vague'. The alcohol studies literature has recently begun to consider atmospheres. For instance, Shaw (2014) explores the night-time city centre as an affective atmosphere, emerging from the coalescing of practices, materials, and bodies. Moreover, geographers have recently begun to engage with atmospheres of darkness and lightness (Edensor, 2013); however, a gap in this field exists, as the atmospheres of dark and lightscapes have largely not been considered in relation to young people's drinking practices.

This paper is novel in comparing drinking in commercial drinking spaces, public spaces, and the home at the same time; it looks at the interplay between the curating of an atmosphere, and the experience of that atmosphere when bodies, and practices are inserted in to it. Engaging with atmospheres of darkness and lightness enables me to go some way towards addressing Jayne et al.'s (2008a, 2008b) contention that drinking spaces are too often rendered passive backdrops, with a failure to consider their role in shaping drinking practices and experiences. More than this though, an atmospheres approach is able to account for the fact that young people co-construct drinking spaces, thereby potentially shaping the drinking practices of themselves and others.

## Atmospheric assemblages

When attempting to conceptualise drinking spaces as active agents with the capacity to shape young people's alcohol consumption practices and experiences, insights can be gained from the more-than-representational theories of 'assemblage' and 'atmosphere'. McFarlane's (2011a) contention that 'assemblage' refers to the agentic distributions of a multiplicity of constitutive human–nonhuman relations, closely connects with much of the impetus of actor–network theory. For instance, actor–network theory prescribes agency, intentionality and subjectivity to nonhumans – attributes commonly reserved for humans (Latour, 2005). As Latour (2004a, p. 226) writes, rather than solely serving as a backdrop for human action, nonhumans may also 'authorise, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on ...'. Not all that dissimilarly, an assemblages approach attends to how entities that differ in nature and kind from one another 'intra-act'<sup>1</sup> (Anderson, Kearns, McFarlane, & Swanton, 2012). Yet, more so than actor–network theory, assemblages attend to the agency of interactions, *along with* the agency of component parts (McFarlane,

2011b). Further, assemblages are not solely relations of stability and rigidity, but of excess, flux, and transformation (McFarlane, 2011a).

Many authors consider atmospheres to be closely connected to assemblage (Shaw, 2014). Like assemblage, atmospheres emerge from the bringing together of different human and more-than-human elements (Shaw, 2014). According to Bohme (2013), 'the character of an atmosphere is the way in which it communicates a feeling to us as participating subjects'. People can stage atmospheres in order to lay the ground for the sensuous, emotional feel of spaces (Bille, Bjerregaard, & Sørensen, 2015). Anderson (2009) notes that atmospheres are 'affective' qualities that emanate from bodies, but also exceed the assembling of bodies. 'Affect' is thought not to denote personal feeling (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988–2014). Whatmore (2006, p. 604) comments that 'affect' refers to: 'the force of intensive relationality – intensities that are felt but not personal; visceral but not confined to an individuated body'. Meanwhile, emotions are considered to 'belong to an individual agent' (Horton & Kraftl, 2006, p. 79); that is, emotions are personally experienced. However, Anderson (2009) points out that atmospheres do not fit neatly into any distinctions between affect and emotion; this is because they are both impersonal, as they belong to collective situations, and yet can be felt as intensely personal. An atmospheric assemblage perspective thus has potential to tease out the spatial, emotional, embodied and affective experiences bound up with young people's alcohol consumption practices and experiences.

Recently, there has been a surge in work adopting an assemblage perspective around the topic of alcohol and other drug use. For instance, Jayne, Valentine, and Holloway (2010, p. 546) talk of 'drunken assemblages', arguing that feelings of closeness, connectivity and belonging when on a 'big night out' are facilitated by assemblages of alcohol, adrenalin, endorphins, affect, shared emotion, alongside interaction with (non)human actants. The authors argue that consuming alcohol in the cityscape illuminates the importance of human and more-than-human actants to both individual and collective geographies of alcohol, drinking and drunkenness. That is, affects, feelings and emotions emerge from a set of assemblages comingling the biological, technical, social and economic. According to Jayne et al. (2010, p. 548), this conceptual framework offers a tentative explanation of how, when high levels of alcohol are consumed in different cities worldwide, a very specific set of emotional and affective registers, assemblages and performativities emerge, resulting in different 'intoxicated urban geographies', along with variations within cities, spaces and venues too. Similarly, Duff (2014), using the example of methamphetamine<sup>2</sup> use in Melbourne, draws on an assemblages approach to transcend the putative rigidities of structural understandings of context, which obscure the specificity of place and the particular means by which contexts shape local drug use behaviour. Following Duff (2014), I suggest that seeing alcohol consumption practices as an assemblage of human and more-than-human forces may lead to the creation of reduction strategies that are sensitive to the place and time of consumption events.

Based on research across greater Melbourne, MacLean and Moore (2014) utilise the notion of 'assemblages' to explore outer-suburban people's participation in the affectively charged spaces of inner-city entertainment precincts. According to MacLean and Moore (2014), more so for young people from outer suburbs than those living closer to the city, going out in the city is an event distinguishable from everyday life. The authors posit that young people's sense of being 'hyped up' in the inner city makes different sets of practices possible, particularly in relation to drinking and being open to new engagements with friends and sexual

partners. Similarly, Bohling (2015) utilises an assemblages approach in his exploration of young people's drinking practices in the night-time economy of Copenhagen, Denmark. Bohling (2015) contends that young people's capacities to initiate and sustain various social, musical and sexual relationships are altered by the consumption of alcohol, in relation to the specific assemblage in which this consumption is enacted. Further, Shaw (2014) develops use of the concept of 'atmosphere' in an 'assemblage urban' approach, as a means of reconceptualising how the night-time city is understood. As Shaw (2014) argues, certain assemblages emerge from multiple practices which collaborate and gather together to control a time and place, producing particular 'affective atmospheres', of which the sale, regulation, and governance of alcohol is just one part. To provide an example, Shaw (2014) notes how taxis have a fundamental role in bringing people and objects (e.g. bottles, mobile phones) into a particular area. Taxis enable people to make their way to the city centre late at night or in the early hours of the morning, having consumed alcohol elsewhere. Consequently, these practices contribute to the emergence of a bustling, flexible atmosphere, intensified within a small time-space. According to Shaw (2014, p. 87), an affective atmosphere is best understood as a form of 'placed assemblage'.

Whilst Shaw's (2014) paper does not move beyond the night-time city centre, the author recognises that there is a need for more studies of places and spaces, which are not the city centre streets or the bars that surround them. This paper goes some way towards addressing Shaw's (2014) plea by engaging with a range of 'atmos-spheres', to use Anderson's (2009, p. 8) phraseology – a term which encapsulates that atmospheres are inherently spatial, surrounding people, things and environments. I pay attention to the atmospheres of drinking experiences in suburban bars and pubs, along with streets, parks and homes.

## Darkness and lightness

The atmospheric qualities of both darkened and lit space has begun to be considered in the geography literature. Several authors have focused on atmospheres of lightness and darkness at special events. For instance, prolific writer on lightness and darkness, Edensor (2012), explores the atmospheric qualities of the Blackpool Illuminations, suggesting that affective atmospheres are coproduced by visitors as part of a festive, convivial, and playful social practice. Elsewhere, again exploring a playful use of light and dark, Edensor (2015a) explores Durham's Fête des Lumières outdoor light festival. For this event, most installations were staged in central shopping districts, heritage districts and university spaces of the city. Edensor (2015a) argues that the event acts to make familiar spaces strange; light contributes to an atmosphere that sends one to other times and places, stimulating nostalgia. When researching another organised event, Edensor and Lorimer (2015) adopt the active role of walker and runner in *Speed of Light*, a performance event staged in Holyrood Park, produced by arts charity NVA, during the 2012 Edinburgh International Festival. For this event, the innovative use of lighting technologies harnessed to walking and running bodies creates a dramatic visual effect. The authors use the term 'landscapism' to refer to a sensibility encapsulated in *Speed of Light* (Edensor & Lorimer, 2015, p. 1). 'Landscapism' can be understood as an affect that is achieved by estranging the expected encounter with topography and atmosphere.

Further examples of lightness and darkness at planned events abound. Edensor (2015a), has undertaken research at an experimental concert, entitled *Eclipse*, staged as part of the



Manchester International Festival, to explore the atmospheric affordances of darkness. In an attempt to foster an understanding of how music may be perceived in the absence of sight, the concert was crafted to take place in darkness. Interestingly, Edensor (2015a) observed that, in contrast to many concerts, the crowd was not animated; as such, he argues that darkness solicits quietness as none of the familiar cues for participation are visible. Further, Edensor (2015a) found that the lack of vision resulted in the sense of hearing predominating. Elsewhere, Edensor and Falconer (2014) have paid attention to the sensory experiences of lightness and darkness, and written about how that the loss of vision means that the senses of sound, touch, smell, and taste predominate. The authors do so through an exploration of the experience of dining in *Dans le Noir?* a restaurant in London where eating takes place in the absence of light. Moreover, Edensor and Falconer (2014) argue that dining in the dark promotes intensified forms of intimacy and conviviality. Key to such work is an aim to highlight some of the more positive qualities of darkness, such as the potential to foster conviviality and intimacy (Edensor, 2015b). This acts as an important redress to conventional conceptualisations of darkness as associated with the primitive, evil and dangerous (Edensor, 2013). Further, an important reminder comes from Shaw's (2015) comment that spaces are rarely wholly dark or wholly light, and thus it is important to recognise that people experience dark and light relatedly.

As the above makes evident, much of the literature on dark and lightsapes focuses on staged affective atmospheres of dark and light; for instance light festivals, concerts, and a 'gastro-tourist site' restaurant (Edensor & Falconer, 2014, p. 1). There are a few notable exceptions where the more 'natural' experiences of lightness and darkness have been considered. For instance, Sumartojo (2015) explores atmospheres of darkness at Australia's Anzac Day Dawn Service – an Australian National Day. The author contends that participants' behaviour was shaped, in part, by atmospheres of darkness. That is, darkness compelled stillness, by obscuring surroundings, slowing bodies, and encouraging quietness, thereby contributing to a solemn, sombre, respectful atmosphere (Sumartojo, 2015). However, the geographies of darkness and lightness literature can still be accused of focusing on infrequently occurring occasions (e.g. national days), with the more everyday experiences of lightness and darkness being largely neglected.

There are a few notable exceptions, in which everyday experiences of lightness and darkness have been explored, particularly in the space of the home. For instance, Shaw (2015) discusses the manipulation of darkness in the home, contending that darkness can induce feelings of relaxation and intimacy, yet also fear. The author concludes that controlling darkness in the home is an act of power. Further, Bille and Sørensen (2007, p. 275) explore the notion of *hygge* in homes in Denmark; that is, 'an intimate state of being and an atmosphere and a mood aspired to in social gatherings ... as a means of invoking hospitality'. The authors contend that whilst the material setting, particularly the use of candle light, influences *hygge*, the accomplishment of *hygge* is also reliant upon human agency (see also Bille, 2015). Additionally, Kumar (2015) looks at light in villages in the Indian state of Bihar. The author argues that lighting up guest's space, as opposed to leaving them in the dark, accords honour to guests; it does so by giving guests precedence over other activities that require light. Furthermore, the provision of 'superior lights' in the 'guest space' gives the guests special treatment, thereby allowing them a higher place in the social hierarchy (Kumar, 2015). Whilst some attention has been directed towards everyday/everynight<sup>3</sup> engagements with lightness and darkness in the home then, there is still a need for engagements with everyday/



everynight experiences of atmospheres of darkness and lightness in outdoor spaces, such as streets and parks.

More than this, as can be deduced from the above review of literature of darkness and lightness, current work on dark and lightscares is largely adultist, often neglecting how young people perceive and (co)produce such atmospheres. A notable exception here is the work of Milligan and Bingley (2007), which touches upon young people's experience of darkness in woods, claiming that dark spaces can prove intimidating rather than therapeutic experiences. Further, a piece of work that acknowledges the importance of darkness for young people, with a focus on ecstasy, is Malbon's (1999) work on clubbing. The author contends that if a club is dark and crowded and eye contact with others is problematic, then a young person is more likely to withdraw, in comparison to if it is lighter and visual contact can be more easily made. Elsewhere, Malbon (1998) highlights the agentic capacities of both lightness and darkness, contending that clubbing is a performance, in which lights (or darkness), the soundscape, the possible consumption of drugs, the practices of dancing, and the proximity of the 'audience', combine in the intense sensual experience of the club. Further, Purnell (2016) offers an autoethnographic account of his engagement with darkness, from the age of 14 to older adulthood, during the struggles he had in accepting his own identity and same-sex attraction. For the author, the darkness of backrooms, roadside rest areas, and behind dumpster in unit alleys, were spaces in which he could act upon his desires. From this, it can be suggested that darkness is liberating, it offers an anonymity not afforded by lightscares. More than this though, darkness not only hid Purnell's (2016) identity, yet also his shame. This darkness in Purnell's (2016) account is not just literal, it is also metaphorical. Darkness acts as a metaphor for the way Purnell (2016, p.7) was feeling, due to a lack of familial support; indeed, it was only when he experienced acceptance from a 'family of choice' (Pahl & Spencer, 2004, p. 218), that he gained a 'beacon out of the darkness'.

Whilst there are a few exceptions in the geographies of children and young people literature in which darkness is mentioned (e.g. Malbon, 1999; Milligan & Bingley, 2007), darkness itself has seldom been conceptually central (see, however, Purnell, 2016). Other than a brief mention of darkness in bars, within which Purnell (2016) consumed alcohol whilst transitioning towards adulthood, young people's experiences of consuming alcohol in atmospheres of darkness and lightness have been largely neglected in the literature. There is thus a need to appreciate the importance of dark and lightscares for young people's alcohol consumption practices and experiences. In this paper, I explore this through discussing atmospheres of lightness and darkness in commercial premises, outdoor drinkscares, and the home, respectively.

## Methodology

I now provide a brief overview of the case study locations. Wythenshawe, was created in the 1920s as a Garden City in an attempt to resolve Manchester's overpopulation problem and 'depravation' in its inner-city slums. Wythenshawe continued to develop up to the 1970s. However, the 1980s and 1990s saw steady decline, high unemployment, decaying infrastructure, crime and drug abuse problems (Atherton, Baker, & Graham, 2005). The area is dominated by white working-class drinking cultures. There are distinct neighbourhoods within Wythenshawe, along with a town centre with various shops, supermarkets, hairdressers, pubs and a club. Wythenshawe is a district eight miles south of Manchester city centre, and

faced with relatively poor transportation links (Lucas, Tyler, & Christodoulou, 2009). Chorlton is a residential area approximately five miles from Manchester city centre. Chorlton is a cosmopolitan neighbourhood with traditional family areas alongside younger, vibrant communities. The area has good road and bus access to, and from, the city centre, and is situated within easy access to the motorway network. Drawing on Manchester City Council's (2012) data, Chorlton has a higher proportion of minority ethnic residents in comparison to Wythenshawe, and compared to the national average (19.1%, compared to the national average of 11.3%). As of November 2011, private residential property in Chorlton accounted for 90.3% of all property in the ward, much higher than the city average of 68.7%. Due to the increasing number of bars and restaurants in Chorlton, a pub watch scheme has been initiated (Young, 2011); that is, a partnership where licensees unify as an independent group to pre-empt crime and anti-social behaviour in licensed premises. Despite the varied locations for recruitment, atmospheres of darkness and lightness seemed to be equally important to young people living in both case study locations, and seemed to transcend class and other demographic differences.

I recruited 40 young people for multistage qualitative research. In some respects, the sampling strategy was purposive, as I aimed to recruit 20 young people from each case study location, and aimed for an equal gender distribution. I recruited the majority of participants through gatekeepers at local schools, community organisations, youth clubs and universities. In order to reach potential participants, I also distributed flyers and business cards to houses and businesses in both case study locations; posted on discussion forums concerning both areas; used Twitter and Facebook to promote my study to locals from each area; and arranged to be interviewed by the host of a local radio station. Some young people were initially cautious about participating in my study, due to worries about others (predominantly their parents or teachers) finding out about their drinking practices. By building trust and friendship with participants (Valentine, 2013), they could then tell their friends about the study and, from their first-hand experience, reassure friends that confidentiality and anonymity are strongly abided by; this is recognised as a snowballing sampling technique. With regards to my positionality, I speculate that being a young researcher (in my twenties) may have been advantageous in some respects. To explain, my age relative to those participants younger than myself is lower than that of an older researcher, and participants perhaps perceived me as being more 'like them', and thus were possibly more willing to divulge their drinking experiences and practices.

I had a palette of methods to utilise, and made clear to the young people that they could 'opt in' to whichever method(s) they wished. As Holland, Renold, Ross, and Hillman (2008, p. 19, emphasis in original) argue: 'by enabling young people to choose *how* they wish to communicate with us we recognise them as social actors and begin to move our practice away from adult-centric procedures'. The methods I draw on in this paper include: in-depth interviews; drawing elicitation interviews; peer interviews; and participant observation of young people's nights in/out involving alcohol. With regard to analysing interviews, peer-interviews, and field notes, I adopted the manual method of coding by pen and paper, perceiving that computer-assisted qualitative data analysis distances researchers from the data (Davis & Meyer, 2009). Initially, following Miles and Huberman's (1994) three stage model, a process of data reduction occurred, whereby I organised the mass of data and attempted to meaningfully reduce this. Second, I undertook a continual process of data display in the form of a table. Third, I undertook a process of conclusion drawing and verification.

With regard to analysing drawings, emphasis was placed on the recorded narratives of participants accompanying their products, in the form of drawing elicitation interviews. This chimes with Barker and Smith's (2012) contention that the interpretation of images should be undertaken with participants to ensure that their intended meanings are explored, rather than interpretive meanings given by the researcher. These data were thus also analysed utilising Miles and Huberman's (1994) aforementioned procedure. Participants feature in this paper through pseudonyms, so as to conceal their identities. Yet, in order to contextualise quotations, genuine ages and locations are given.

Along with seeking approval from the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee, what Guillemin and Gillam (2004, p. 263) refer to as 'procedural ethics' - I also consulted, and adhered to, the ESRC's 2010 *Framework for Research Ethics* (see latest version, ESRC, 2015). My research was undertaken overtly, in which my research intentions were explained to participants prior to, and during, their involvement in the project. I informed all potential participants about the research in an accessible information sheet, and gave them two weeks 'thinking time' before deciding whether, or not, they wished to participate in the research project (Waite, Jessop, & Gorman-Murray, 2011). For those under 16 years of age, alongside gaining assent from the young person, I also gained consent from parent(s) (Valentine, 1999). Whilst ethical guidelines were useful, they, alone, were insufficient in ensuring I acted in an ethical manner. This is because ethical guidelines are not sufficient for addressing 'ethics in practice' - that is, the day-to-day ethical quandaries arising through the process of *doing* research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 264). Spaces and happenings are perpetually in process, and consequently ethical incidents constantly arise (Horton, 2008). This necessitated me to be 'ethically reflexive' (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004) throughout the research process.

## Commercial drinksapes

Lightness and darkness are not merely naturally occurring; such atmospheres can be significantly modified by technology. People are able to control how bodies can be open to other objects and bodies by shaping atmospheres of lightness and darkness. See Jenny's contention below regarding her experience of darkness in a commercial drinkscape:

You go in [to the pub], and it's better when the lights are off so we try and go in dead late, at about 10 pm, because then you can't tell how rough they [men in the pub] all look. Yeah you just go in when it's dark and then like we're always the first ones up dancing. (Jenny, 16, Wythenshawe, drawing elicitation interview)

Here, Jenny intimates that her affective experience of the pub-space has been conditioned by previous experience (see Edensor, 2012). As a result of 'atmospheric attunement' (Edensor, 2012, p. 114) to the pub, Jenny has developed skilled, corporeal knowledge of it; she knows that by going in at 'about 10 pm' the 'lights are off'. Jenny talks about light as a protective field, a boundary separating her from the 'rough' bodies present in the club-space, holding these bodies at a distance. The darkness of the pub-space, however, means these bodies are no longer held at a distance; they become hidden and unknown (Shaw, 2015). In the 'protecting "bubble" of light', Jenny's sense of space is much clearer, but in the darkness one can see that she has a more fluid spatiality (see Shaw, 2015, p. 590). Here, Jenny hints at the affective power of darkness, and how it shapes her experience of space (see Shaw, 2015). That is, being unhindered by multiple visual distractions of 'rough' bodies, darkness cajoled

her body into movement (see Edensor, 2013), motivating her body's dancing mobilities. Darkness then, is generative of atmosphere; it is generative through the affects that it engenders (Sumartojo, 2015). This example foregrounds the ways in which atmospheres produce a situational affective context that motivates movement and feeling.

As the above has intimated, drunkenness is not about alcohol alone (see Jayne et al., 2010). Indeed, my participant observations showed me that the lighting, music, non-alcoholic drinks, glasses, and other bodies were all materials acting on me, influencing my corporeal experience of space, and making a difference to the social experiences of alcohol consumption (see Duff, 2008, 2012). The can be illustrated through the following passage from my field diary:

It is interesting that, despite only having one vodka and coke, I felt drunk. Normally, I require a certain number of drinks in order to have the confidence to dance. However, tonight, being surrounded by other mobile drunken bodies, the darkness of the club, and the thump of the upbeat music, increased my ability to dance uninhibited ... I even found myself participating in the Gangnam Style dance<sup>4</sup> without feeling self-conscious! (Field diary, 21 December 2013, night out with Maisy, 18, and friends, Wythenshawe)

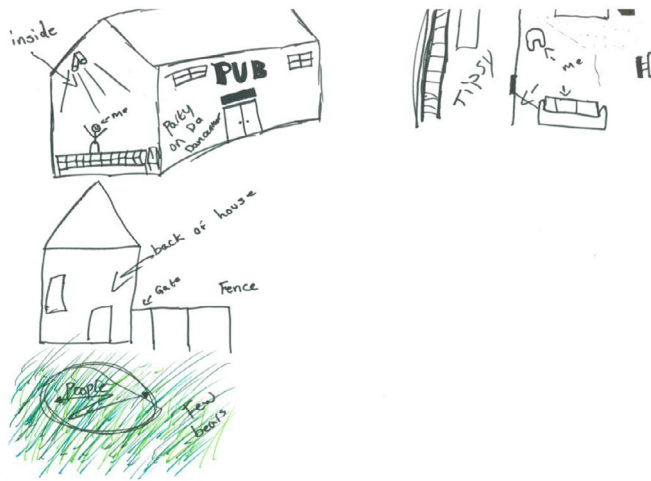
From the above extract, one can see that I experienced a transformation, my body 'became' drunk, through its practices and encounters in assemblages with other drunken bodies, the sonic environment, and lighting in the affectively charged space (see Waitt & Stanes, 2015). Indeed, I was not alone in recognising this. This notion is also evidenced in Peter's map of his drinking spaces (see Figure 1).

When discussing his map with me, Peter said that alcohol, lighting and 'good' music in the pub are important for enhancing his dancing mobilities, and enabling him to transition from his usual shy and reserved self to someone who is outgoing. That is, the affective atmosphere of human and more-than-human actants primed him to act in a particular way (see Bissell, 2010), temporally managing his moods and movements (Forsyth, 2009).

As I have indicated, through participant observations, I became attuned to the affective components of spaces (see Shaw, 2014). More than this though, my embodied experiences taught me that different assemblages had different outcomes. For instance, brighter lighting and unfamiliar music were not conducive to dancing mobilities, thereby producing different rhythms. I wrote about this in the below excerpt from my field diary:

Whilst low-lighting and up-beat popular music primed me and others to dance, I noticed that the dance floor became scarce when lighting was brighter, and when less popular music was being played, leading some people to use this as a cue to go to the bar and get another drink. (Field diary, 24 May 2014, night out with Evie, 24, and friends, from Chorlton, in city centre)

As the above illustrates, rhythms of the club-space are continuously open to change. Forsyth (2009) explores the role of music in the night-time economy, suggesting that it can alter moods and behaviour. According to the author, an emotional response elicited by hearing a familiar song may encourage increased spending at the bar on that occasion. However, my participant observations show that young people are unlikely to leave the dance floor when familiar songs are being played. Rather, they use moments when unfamiliar, or unpopular, songs are being played to purchase drinks. Nonetheless, music, to echo Forsyth and Cloonan (2008), plays a key role in alcohol consumption at the micro-level. The affective atmospheres of club-spaces cannot be attributed to auditory stimulus alone, yet by poly-rhythmic assemblage of bodies, soundscapes, and lightscapes (Tan, 2013). Consider this excerpt from my field diary:



**Figure 1.** Peter's night out (Peter, 15, Wythenshawe).

I witnessed that when the DJ played a popular, upbeat convivial song, such as Black Eyed Peas' [American hip hop group] cover of *I've Had The Time Of My Life*, whilst simultaneously illuminating the clubspace – this indented the rhythmic proceedings, signalling to young people that the club was closing. (Field diary, 1 March 2014, night out with Melinda, 21, and friends, Wythenshawe)

The above excerpt offers an example of what Barratt (2012, p. 50) describes as 'technology communicating' – the positive music and bright lighting was used to infer that the club was closing. From my participant observations, this technical and social assemblage offered a non-confrontational means of signalling the end of the night.

## Outdoor drinksapes

There are claims that darkness has been largely eliminated, as a consequence of a desire to expand social and economic activity, which subsequently illuminates nightsapes (Major, 2015). Despite this, there are still areas that remain unlit after dark, including some streets and parks (Edensor, [in press](#)). As Edensor (2013) articulates, there is a prevailing cultural understanding that darkness is a negative condition, a frightening, mysterious void; this can be gleaned through the quotations below, and was more commonly articulated by young people in my study from Chorlton, particularly young women:

SW: <sup>5</sup> Have you ever walked through the streets in Chorlton during the night, what do you think of them?

Susan: I'm often, I'm often quite nervous. I think that's probably just me, if I'm on my own I'm quite nervous walking home in the dark.

Julie: That's more the dark.

Susan: Yeah, that's more me and the dark and things.

Julie: The dark and fear of crime and things than actual drinking.

Susan: But if I'm, with somebody else, especially when I'm with someone I trust then it doesn't really bother me, and if you're going through a place with lights, and lots of people,

then you're fine. Whereas if you go down an alleyway it's a bit like 'ah I'm going to get killed' (Susan, 16, and Julie, 15, Chorlton, friendship group interview)

I find, my impression of Chorlton is actually, it's a bit intimidating, it feels like ... so Fallowfield [a suburban locality in Manchester] is a bit more lit up, so even though I wouldn't hang around, I could pass through a bit quicker, whereas in Chorlton I feel like quite quickly, although there's hubs a bit around the streets where the bars are, quite quickly you're a bit more in the darkness, like into bits that aren't lit up. (Andy, 18, Chorlton, interview)

Here, it can be seen that walking in darkness, whilst under the influence of alcohol, is unnerving for some young people; Julie associates darkness with 'fear of crime', and Andy prefers walking through Fallowfield than Chorlton, as he considers it to be more illuminated. Some young women in my study attempt to walk together in friendship groups as a means of being more spatially confident in darkness. This practice of walking together can be referred to as being 'mobile with' (Jensen, 2010, p. 293). Indeed, when friends walk out of sync with each other, this can cause tensions. This idea can be seen through the following exchange:

SW: What do you think of the streets in Wythenshawe during the night?

Vera: Urm, oh it was early in the morning, and I was with one of me mates, and it was really dark and we was walking over a bridge, but I get dead scared, I do get scared, really scared, I was holding on to her like 'please wait for me'. And we was drunk as well, and I was high, so I was like para [paralytic], terrible, I was nearly crying, and she was going fast, she was walking really fast. (Vera, 15, Wythenshawe, interview)

Here, Vera tells that her friend was walking too fast, 'stretching' the mobile formation (see McIlvenny, 2015 on biking together), by walking away from her. Resultantly co-presence was not maintained, increasing Vera's feelings of fear.

Not all young people in my study conceptualised darkness as a negative atmosphere. Some young people actively sought darkness, because it makes drinkscape exciting, alluring and mysterious (see Edensor, 2013, 2015b). Take the comments below:

If I'm drinking in the dark it's better, because I don't know what I'm going to do or where I'm going to end up. (Summer, 16, Wythenshawe, drawing elicitation interview)

I like to drink in the park because it's always dark and no one's ever there, so you don't really think about anything. I'm in me own world. (Vera, 15, Wythenshawe, interview)

Here, Summer intimates that the nocturnal landscape is visually apprehended in a different way to that of the day (Cook & Edensor, 2014). In lightless place, Summer is involved in a temporary move away from spatial, social and sensory norms (see Edensor & Falconer, 2014). Due to a limited perceptible space, she suggests that in darkness it is harder to judge depth and distance (Morris, 2011). Summer states that, through her embodied experience of darkness, she 'doesn't know what she's going to do', or 'where she's going to end up' – she becomes significantly more open to the 'other' (Shaw, 2015). For Summer then, darkness is not just a background within which action takes place – it has the agency to alter this action (Shaw, 2015). Following this, one can see that Vera finds 'succour' and 'refuge' in the quiet and affective site of gloom, due to the imperceptible presence of others (Edensor, 2013, p. 449). Vera's contention that, when in darkness, she is 'in her own world' resonates with Shaw's (2015, p. 590) assertion that 'night penetrates into our sense of self – it erodes the body and its independence from other objects'. Whilst Edensor (2013, p. 463) contends that 'darkness offers opportunities to dream, mull over, remember and worry', for Vera, darkness has the allure of doing none of these things, she 'doesn't really think about anything'. This resonates



with Jayne et al.'s (2012, p. 221) contention that alcohol consumption often allows one to 'do nothing' and 'use up time'. Darkness then, echoing Edensor (2015a), is a key element through which the atmospheric experience of space can be infused with qualities, including mystery, solace, intimacy, and fun.

However, it is important not to conceptualise lightness and darkness as binary opposites, for there are many shades of light and dark. The comments from Louisa and Teresa illustrate this idea:

I use to live in Devon and I would drink in Madeira walk. It's just a little sort of pathway urm that had sort of looked out to the seafront but it's all underneath, like it's all shadowed, it's in a sort of little foresty bit so like big tall trees and it's got benches where you can sit and drink ... I drank in lots of outside open public spaces, in dark corners. (Louisa, 22, Chorlton, peer interview)

Near my mum's house there's like this urm massive long path and at the time it didn't have lights, so we used to always call it the 'black path', and we'd drink on there. It was just dead funny like cos we'd all just mess around ... cos obviously it was so dark, like there was a block of flats like, like to one side of this thing and so we'd just use like the torches and stuff like that to shine on people's windows ... and then we'd hide because it was so dark you wouldn't be able to see us. (Teresa, 16, Wythenshawe, drawing elicitation interview)

When reminiscing on her early drinking experiences, in addition to paying attention to darkness, Louisa conceives of shadows in a positive way. Here, shadow has been celebrated for its generative capacity (see Edensor, 2015b): it helps craft a secretive drinkscape. Teresa discusses the atmosphere generated from playing with light in a dark space. Here, Teresa tells that drinking in darkness, infused with light from torches, solicits an intensification of social engagement, producing an affective connection between drinkers and a shared sense of adventure (see Edensor & Falconer, 2014). The torches helped to emphasise a feeling of proximity to the surroundings and its contents (Morris, 2011).

## Shaping indoor drinksapes

Indoor spaces are very important for many young people's drinking practices, whether they chose to spend the entire night in this space, or use the home as a space to 'Pre-drink'. 'Pre-drinking', also termed pre-loading, pre-gaming, front-loading, or prinks (Gee, Jackson, & Sam, 2014) is the practice of intensive drinking in a pair or group in preparation for a night out. Due to their familiarity with the micro-geographies of the space of the home, I witnessed some young people 'socially sculpture' their experiences; this phrase refers to the trajectory a night can take, from an idea – to a situation bodies can tangibly experience (Moore, 2013). Put another way, young people took control over their experience of darkness, by staging atmospheres (Bille, 2015), in order to influence their experiences of drunkenness. The following excerpt lends credence to Bille's (2015) contention that light has the capacity to influence the way people behave and feel:

When I arrived at Louisa's at 8.00 pm, lights were turned off, yet candles were lit. The candles, and slow paced music, contributed towards the creation of a calm atmosphere. The candles set the tone that this would not be a 'big night out', but rather a relaxing night in over a few glasses of wine. (Field diary, night in with Louisa, 22, and friends, Chorlton)

From the above excerpt, one can see that Louisa had power over the affectivity of her friend's bodies through controlling how they experience darkness and lightness (Shaw, 2015). Here, the practice of lighting candles was used by Louisa as 'a tool' (Bille & Sørensen, 2007, 263) to



exercise a 'gentle suggestion' (Sumartojo, 2014, p. 62) that she desired the night ahead to be low-key. Lighting then, was cultivated towards relaxation (Bille, 2015), transforming the young people's experiences of space (see Ebbensgaard, 2015). Louisa was relying upon her friends possessing the corporeal capacities to sense rhythms of light and sound (see Duffy, Waitt, Gorman-Murray, & Gibson, 2011); it seemed her friends responded to the sculptural proposition (Moore, 2013), as they attuned themselves to the rhythmicity of the moment, through the pace of their consumption of alcohol. This was reflected through a later excerpt from my field diary:

A few hours after arriving at Louisa's, I looked around her sitting room, and all the guests, including me, were slowly sipping wine from their glasses. The night was drawn to a close prior to midnight. The candles seemed to have achieved the purpose of nonverbally communicating that 'excessive' alcohol consumption was not appropriate tonight. (Field diary, night in with Louisa, 22, and friends, Chorlton)

The relaxing atmosphere did not simply control the young people. The rhythmic structuring of the night in was not individual, rather it was collective (see Edensor, 2010), and relied upon the synchronisation of drinking practices. This indicates, in line with Edensor (2015a), that atmospheres are not formed out of one element – candle light in this instance; rather, they continuously emerge out of an assemblage of forces, affects and happenings. Young people also contributed to its generation; the atmosphere is thus best understood as a 'co-produced' one (Edensor, 2015c, p. 83). More than simply the functional practice of increasing visibility for activities to take place (Bille, 2015), I suggest that lighting practices also create and shape drinking spaces, and thereby drinking practices and experiences.

## Conclusion

With a focus on suburban indoor and outdoor drinking spaces, this paper has looked at the interplay between the curating of an atmosphere, and the experience of that atmosphere, when bodies and practices are inserted into it. Whilst there is a prevailing cultural understanding that darkness is a negative condition, a frightening, mysterious void (Morris, 2011), I have found that young people conceptualise darkness in different ways, in different times and spaces. Many young people spoke about some of the positive emotional, embodied and affective qualities of dark drinksapes. I have shown how many young people actively seek darkness, because it makes drinksapes exciting and alluring, offering a temporary move away from spatial, social and sensory norms (Edensor & Falconer, 2014). Some young people demonstrated that they found 'refuge' in quiet and affective spaces of gloom, due to the imperceptible presence of others (Edensor, 2013, p. 449). For other young people, the limited perceptible space in the absence of light led to an enhanced focus on the immediate surroundings within which one could drink and socialise with friends. Consequently, as Edensor and Falconer (2014) said of dark dining, I contend that dark drinking has the ability to intensify social engagement, affectively connecting drinkers and producing a shared sense of adventure. More than this, I have argued that drinking in the dark is liberating for young people, offering escapism from the visual judgement of others.

Further, I have suggested that it is important not to construe young people within atmospheres as passive. My findings show that young people are able to take control over their experiences of darkness and lightness, by staging atmospheres, and thereby influencing

experiences of drunkenness. I showed how light has the capacity to influence drinking and drunkenness. For instance, in the space of the home, candles can be used as a tool to exercise a 'gentle suggestion' (Sumartojo, 2014, p. 62) that the desire is for the night ahead to be a low-key one. Young people, then, can contribute towards the generation of relaxing drinking atmospheres. Through paying attention to atmospheres, I have shown that spaces and places are not passive backdrops to young people's drinking practices and experiences; rather, they are active constituents with the ability to shape drinking occasions (Jayne et al., 2012). More than this though, young people are not passive to atmospheres; they have the agency to co-construct affective atmospheres, thereby influencing the drinking practices and experiences of themselves and others.

An atmospheres approach, which attends to the social, material and affective forces that participate in consumption events, can illuminate the spatial and temporal aspects of alcohol consumption. This offers novel means of transforming consumption events in order to reduce the harms that may be associated with them (Duff, 2014). Whilst drinking behind closed doors at home has come to be thought of more negatively in popular and policy press, in comparison to consuming alcohol in policed and surveilled convivial pre-formed public drinking spaces (Beckingham et al., 2010; Telegraph, 2014), I have shown that, perhaps more so than in commercial drinking spaces, the home is a space in which young people have control over their drinking atmospheres, and thereby drinking occasions. My findings have shown how young people are able to manipulate lighting and darkness in the home, as a means of non-verbally shaping drinking practices and experiences. Consequently, I recommend that policy-makers should offer advice to young people regarding how to create positive affective atmospheres during drinking sessions at home, including 'pre-drinking' occasions. This is important because drinking spaces are not bounded; they are relational and porous, and consequently atmospheres and emotions experienced when pre-drinking can affect the tenor of encounters experienced in other times and spaces.

## Notes

1. The term 'intra-act' refers to the relationship between the apparatuses of bodily production and the phenomena produced (Barad, 2003).
2. An extremely addictive drug.
3. I use the term 'everynight' purposefully, inspired by Malbon (1998).
4. A pop single by the South Korean musician Psy, released in 2012, renowned for the choreography and moves in its music video, including gallop, lasso, leg sweep, flick, shuffle, pop and pose.
5. Author's initials.

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